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MORAL VERSUS AESTHETIC APPROACHES: THE RELEVANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

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Abstract. Many philosophers, beginning with Plato, have classified aesthetic and moral judgments together on the basis of one important, shared feature: both involve value judgments. This practice is misleading, as these two forms of judgment can be very different; for instance, moral judgments always imply obligation and the compulsion to act in certain ways, features that are not necessarily present in aesthetic judgments. This difference has given moral judgments a certain degree of seriousness (Scruton 1974), which implies they must always override other concerns, including aesthetic ones. The difference between moral and aesthetic judgments is, perhaps, most clearly highlighted in the realm of environmental protection. If most of the practical reasons for environmental protection are essentially moral (being geared toward ensuring the survival of present and future generations of humans), then they must override all aesthetic concerns for environmental preservation. How then should we weigh the importance of aesthetic considerations in environmental protection?

Keywords and phrases: moral dimension, aesthetic approach, emotional expression, universality, uniqueness

INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that aesthetic reasons for environmental protection are as important as those that focus on practical concerns (e.g., we need to protect the environment to safeguard biodiversity on Earth, we need to reduce carbon emissions to prevent global warming, etc.). However, nearly all of the practical reasons for environmental protection have, as their ultimate goal, the survival and wellbeing of human beings (e.g., we need to prevent global warming because it can affect food production, which will in turn affect human survival; we need to maintain biodiversity, as the destruction of any species will affect others in the food chain, which may then negatively impact our food supply in the future; we have to decrease air pollution in cities to protect our wellbeing and quality of life, etc.). These reasons for environmental preservation, in addition to being practical, also have a moral dimension (anything that infringes on human survival and

wellbeing must necessarily be morally significant). It is said that aesthetic reasons for environmental protection do not have this dimension because they focus principally on pleasure (e.g., we need to preserve Niagara Falls so that future generations can delight in witnessing its majesty and great beauty). Most of the time, these practical and aesthetic reasons are unlikely to conflict because they are aimed at the same objectives of preserving and protecting the natural environment. Still, there may be occasions when we need to rank these reasons in order of importance and choose between them. One ranking scheme might accord value to each dimension according to the intended goal: if pleasure is what we are pursuing, then aesthetic reasons might be more important than practical ones aimed ultimately at human survival. However, if asked to choose between human survival and pleasure, most people would prioritise the former. Furthermore, ethical judgments imply that we have a moral obligation or duty to do what is right (along with a similar compulsion to refrain from doing what is wrong), whereas aesthetic judgment entails no such sense of obligation (Johnson 1973, 178). No one is obligated to see Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* as highly successful in evoking a peculiar feeling of sadness, even if many experts make this assertion. It is for this reason that we take ethical judgments far more seriously than aesthetic ones. Thus, aesthetic reasons appear to be condemned to an inferior status: they may supplement practical reasons for environmental preservation, but they can neither replace nor achieve equal standing with morally significant, practical reasons. However, is it true that aesthetic reasons for environmental protection are completely devoid of moral significance? Indeed, perhaps our capacity for aesthetic pleasure contributes to our wellbeing and to that of future generations.

PRACTICAL VERSUS AESTHETIC REASONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

I want to begin by distinguishing between aesthetic and what I call practical reasons for environmental protection. Examples of such practical reasons include the following: we need to reduce carbon emissions because they lead to global warming, and global warming can destroy the habitat; we need to preserve the environment to protect the wellbeing and quality of life of future generations; and we should cut back on vehicles that use fossil fuel because they discharge huge quantities of carbon monoxide, which will affect our wellbeing and quality of life. I have classified these as "practical reasons" because they are all directed (ultimately) at preserving the human race and its wellbeing. In other words, these reasons treat environmental protection as the means to an end, with the end being the preservation of the human species.

Less well known but perhaps equally important is the aesthetic argument for protecting the environment. Some aestheticians and philosophers now argue that disregarding aesthetic considerations must necessarily deplete the strength of the argument for environmental protection and preservation. We frequently take an aesthetic approach to the surrounding environment and are willing to pay for the pleasure that we derive from contemplating its beauty. A person may buy a house on a mountainside or near the beach to experience the sheer pleasure of admiring the scenery, even though that person usually ends up paying much more than they would for a similar house elsewhere. We go for long walks in the countryside on weekends enjoy the natural beauty of the surrounding environment. Those who can afford it often plant home gardens in which they can sip tea and enjoy the pleasant surroundings. In other words, we do sometimes admire the beauty, serenity, harmony, and magical appeal of nature, an attitude toward the object that is devoid of any functional or utilitarian concerns. Philosophers would deem this approach to the environment to be *aesthetic,* and it is this notion of the "aesthetic approach" that we will consider in subsequent sections of this article. First, however, it is critical that we distinguish the aesthetic attitude from what is commonly regarded as the moral attitude (or moral approach).

THE AESTHETIC APPROACH DOES NOT TREAT THE OBJECT AS A MEANS, BUT AS AN END

As noted before, the practical reasons offered for environmental protection tend to be aimed at the survival, welfare and wellbeing of the human population. Examples of such well-known reasons include "we need to preserve the environment in order to ensure the survival and welfare of future generations"; "we need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in order to prevent further damage to the habitat, and degradation or destruction of the habitat will destroy the human species"; and "we need to look for cleaner alternative energy in order to prevent rapid global warming (the suggestion is global warming affects agriculture and human health, thereby endangering survival of the human race)". The main characteristic of what I call "practical reasons for environmental protection" is that they are directed at attaining a certain end, specifically "the survival and welfare of humankind". Protecting and preserving the environment is only the means for attaining this very important end, not the end itself. In principle, means are usually substitutable in that they are not valued for their own sake (we take medicine to get better, and we do not value the medicine for its own sake; it is only valued for its function). If we could attain the same end with more efficient means, we might happily switch to those means. When it comes to environmental protection, though, the situation is quite exceptional because the means appear to be a necessary condition for attaining the end. This situation differs significantly from, say, the goal of achieving high grades on a college

examination; in the latter case, I might study hard, copy another student's work, or employ personal influence on my examiner to attain my aim (each of the means mentioned here is not necessary to attaining the end, even though I must opt for at least one of them to attain my objective). This means and end relationship is very much a feature of the practical approach to environmental protection.

I argue that this type of relationship is, however, absent within the aesthetic motivations for environmental protection. Nelson Goodman (1993, 397) suggests as much when he writes,

> What…distinguishes…aesthetic activity from other intelligent behavior such as perception, ordinary conduct, and scientific inquiry? One instant answer is that the aesthetic is directed to no practical end, is unconcerned with self-defense or conquest, with acquisition of necessities or luxuries, with prediction or control of nature. But if the aesthetic attitude disowns practical aims, still aimlessness is hardly enough… Disinterested inquiry embraces both scientific and aesthetic experience.

Although the absence of any practical end is not a sufficient condition in the aesthetic approach (pure science, unlike applied science or technology, also has no practical end), it is, nonetheless, a necessary condition. Accordingly, the aesthetic approach is not directed at improving human life and wellbeing, acquiring necessities or wealth, manipulating nature, or (as Goodman puts it) self-defence or conquest. In contrast to the practical approach, which treats the object (in this case, the natural environment) as only a means to an end, the aesthetic approach treats the object as an end in itself.

One might object that, even in the aesthetic approach, we often use the natural environment as a means for evoking, experiencing, or enjoying certain emotions or mental states. When we say that the seaside is serene or that the mountain is majestic, we are treating these natural landscapes as the means of attaining some emotional response or experience. It is these emotions or mental states that we value, not the natural environment itself. Art objects may also be seen in this manner. However, this view has been refuted by most aestheticians writing on the issue. Scruton (1974, 19) asserts that:

> …aesthetic interest cannot be interest in an object as a means to the evocation of emotion, and hence that to treat a play, for example, as though it were a vehicle for arousing pity and terror is to fall into the error of the heteronomy of aesthetic judgment. The play is not a means for arousing dramatic emotions, and

> hence to the extent that one's enjoyment of a play consists in the experience of these emotions it is not aesthetic — for the play might equally have been replaced by some other object of similar feelings.

It would be a serious mistake to treat Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* simply as a tool or means for arousing pity and fear (which Aristotle may have done in his *Poetics*), as this view must imply that any other play, object, thing or situation capable of arousing similar feelings of pity and fear could function as a substitute for *Oedipus Rex*. If *Oedipus Rex* could be substituted in that way, it would not have lasted for centuries as one of the world's greatest tragic dramas. The same can be said for Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. If this famous Mozart symphony were simply a means for evoking the emotions it arouses, then perhaps some substitute could perform the job just as efficiently; if this were the case, the symphony would not enjoy as much longstanding regard as it does. We would not insist that the compositions of the great composers are irreplaceable and unique. The same argument applies to the aesthetic enjoyment of a natural landscape: the object (e.g., a particular stretch of beach) is not simply a means to the emotion or mental state it evokes, or else it would simply be a replaceable means to an end. The natural landscape would not be highly treasured once we found another way of evoking the same emotion.

This defence of uniqueness seems to lead us to a state of "totally disinterested contemplation" in aesthetics, where only "certain formal properties" of the object can be mentioned (Scruton 1974, 19) and remarks on emotional responses to the object are regarded as irrelevant, or marginal at best. However, great works of art (and famous natural landscapes) are remembered precisely for their power to evoke mental states, not simply their dry formal properties. The view that the object of aesthetic interest is unique does not necessarily lead us to mere disinterested observation of its formal properties. Neither should it lead us to the view that the object is only a means for evoking the emotion. Scruton, for instance, argues that the emotion being evoked by the object is usually of a peculiar sort that can only be re-experienced by recalling the object (or some feature of the object), which must mean that the object is indispensable to the experience of the emotion. We might also say (following Scruton's most significant contribution to the idea of artistic symbolism, see 1974, 229–237) that in the aesthetic approach, the relationship between the object and the emotion it evokes is not causal but logical, and in a logical relationship, it is impossible to separate the two items (i.e., object and emotion) into a means and an end. To describe the peculiar emotion evoked by a landscape, I must necessarily refer to that landscape (or features in the landscape); o re-experience the peculiar emotion, I need to recall the landscape (or some feature of it) to mind. Thus, one values the object according to the emotion it evokes; the object and the emotion

being evoked are very intimately related, such that one cannot exist without the other. The difference between practical and aesthetic reasons is simply that, in the former, we preserve the environment as a means to save what we truly value, such as human beings and their welfare, while in the latter, we preserve the environment for its own sake (and in doing so we also preserve its beauty, along with all that we value about the environment). As pointed out by Scruton, because the object is intimately linked to the emotion, preserving our capacity to re-experience the emotion necessarily entails preserving the object.

Importantly, practical reasons for environmental protection have moral overtones that aesthetic reasons tend to lack. This difference is due partly to the fact that practical reasons deal with highly important human interests, i.e., the survival and welfare of the human race, and anything directed at these ends must include a moral dimension. We could actually rephrase these practical reasons into arguments that clearly reveal their moral dimension, e.g., *Anything that harms human life is bad, and the continuous production of greenhouse gases by agriculture and industry will lead to global warming, which can harm human life in the long run* or *Acting in ways that endanger the well-being of future generations is wrong, and continuous logging and deforestation can really lead to environmental and climatic changes that harm the wellbeing of future generations of people.* Thus, comparing moral and aesthetic approaches to environmental protection seems particularly promising because practical reasons for environmental preservation can certainly form part of the moral approach to environmental issues.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AESTHETIC AND MORAL JUDGMENTS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

One major task of this work is to differentiate moral and aesthetic judgments and to investigate each one's relationship to environmental preservation. However, I wish to state my intention and purpose more clearly to avoid any possible misinterpretations of my argument.

Firstly, I want to stress that I am not investigating the moral aspects of art or art criticism; I will not deal with the ethical issues relating to the art object, the practice of art, or the realm of art criticism. Neither will I be discussing the aesthetic aspects of moral life and moral evaluation. Such concerns may be highly important, but they belong to another article. My chief concern here is to look for features or characteristics in the aesthetic attitude toward environmental protection that distinguish it from the moral attitude and from other practical approaches to this issue.

It is important to distinguish between the aesthetic and moral approaches because many philosophers, dating back as far as Plato, have mistakenly assumed that moral and aesthetic judgments are "similar", as both are essentially value disciplines (Oliver Johnson 1973, 178). I suggest, however, that aesthetic and moral judgments are significantly different, as my discussion will reveal.

I have argued that the aesthetic approach to the environment is important, but is it as important as (or even more important than) practical concerns about the environment? Now, if these practical concerns involve moral considerations (e.g., someone might argue that depleting the environment infringes on the interests of future generations and destroying the interests of future generations is morally wrong), then they will always override aesthetic interests. One distinguishing feature of a moral judgment is its ability to override other concerns that may conflict with it. Oliver Johnson (1973, 178) makes this point, arguing against the assumption that moral and aesthetic judgments are similar:

> For the fact is that ethics contains a crucial dimension that has no counterpart in aesthetics—the dimension to which we apply concepts of right and wrong, duty and obligation. I do not deny that the terms that I have just used can be applied, and properly so, to the realm of aesthetics but I would insist that when they are so applied they stand for concepts substantially different in meaning from those appropriate to ethics.

We are duty-bound to act according to certain moral principles. If an action is considered to be just or in accordance with fairness and justice, then we are morally obligated to act accordingly. If a certain action is vicious, then one is morally obligated to refrain from acting in that manner. Failing to do so would be considered as a weakness of the will or a moral deficiency, for which one could be blamed and penalised accordingly. I will later argue that this, in fact, is the only significant difference between aesthetic and moral judgments; philosophers' attempts to draw up other differences have been relatively unsuccessful. We have argued that the practical reasons for environmental preservation show that protecting the environment is morally significant because it involves the most important human interests (i.e., the survival of the human species and the wellbeing of future generations). If so, then all people are duty-bound to protect the environment, and it is morally wrong to degrade the environment or to act in ways contrary to environmental preservation. Placing a moral duty in the *ought* category also means it must override other concerns if its execution should conflict with these concerns (and, one could add, that it must also be given priority over other interests). Thus, if practical reasons for environmental preservation have moral overtones, they can override other concerns that may come into conflict with them. Aesthetic reasons for environmental protection,

lacking this capacity to override other concerns they may conflict with, can never attain the degree of importance held by practical reasons. Because aesthetic and practical reasons for environmental preservation are not mutually exclusive, they seem unlikely to conflict. In fact, aesthetic reasons for environmental protection may even reinforce practical ones.

The above condition of "overridingness" is the strongest, and perhaps only, significant reason for prioritising moral over aesthetic considerations. However, a number of other possible differences between the moral and aesthetic approaches have been proposed. One distinction often cited by philosophers is the universality of moral judgment as opposed to the particularity of aesthetic judgment. To explain the concept of the universality of moral judgments, I turn to Immanuel Kant. Kant describes a necessary condition (although not, perhaps, a sufficient condition) of a moral act when he asserts that we should "act only according to that maxim by which [we] can at the same time will it should become a universal law" (Kant 1928, 82). This statement is essential to Kant's definition of a *categorical imperative*. A maxim such as Kant mentions can take the form "To achieve A (my objective or end), I will have to do B (the action) in circumstance C (the situation)". Then, to determine whether I have acted morally, all I need to do is to assess whether the maxim on which my action is based is suitable as a universal law. In other words, I must determine whether anyone who is fully rational and not swayed by self-interest, desires, wants, strong emotions, or other sensuous impulses, would (or must), when faced with similar circumstances, act in the same way. What is right for one person must necessarily be right for anyone else in the same position. This contention also implies that when I make a moral judgment, I can expect agreement from everyone (Ibid). For example, if I say that kidnapping babies to sell to rich families who have no children is morally wrong, I can expect everyone to agree with my assertion, even though some people may continue to do it.

Let us apply this reasoning to maxims derived from the practical reasons given for environmental protection. If these reasons can be accepted as universal laws that should be prescribed for everyone, then, by Kant's criteria, they have the status of moral prescriptions. Consider the following: For the sake of safeguarding the physical interests of future generations (such as ensuring that they have adequate food, clean air, good health, and normal atmospheric temperatures), we must either stop or drastically reduce the present rate of logging. Now, if tests by environmental experts and other scientists were to confirm that the present rate of logging will adversely affect the physical wellbeing of future generations, then the anti-logging maxim should apply to everyone; to do something that will degrade the physical wellbeing of future generations must certainly be an act that is morally wrong. Similar maxims might be prescribed in reference to the present rate of fossil fuel usage or the

discharging of chemical and other wastes into waterways. These maxims, if supported by scientific evidence, would be moral in nature: anyone who is fully rational and not swayed by personal interests, sensuous impulses or desires will agree to act according to such maxims. Anyone who is rational and not strongly affected by narrow self-interest or sensuous impulses (like desires, fears, or wants) will agree that doing something that degrades the well-being of future generations is morally wrong and will refrain from doing it. Thus, maxims derived from practical reasons for environmental preservation can be formulated as moral judgments.

Can we derive similar maxims from aesthetic judgments (pertaining either to artwork or to the natural environment) that are universally applicable? The answer provided by some aestheticians is "no"; we simply cannot do the same for aesthetic judgments because of the very nature of such judgments. This view is most clearly stated by Richard W. Miller (1998, 42):

> There are no laws or valid rules which say which properties of an object (i.e., the properties that an aesthetically sensitive person might recognise) prompt aesthetic appreciation. So if one does not defer to others' aesthetic judgments in making such evaluative claims, one's basis must be one's own response to the concrete presence of the object.

According to this view, in the aesthetic approach we can respond adequately to the object only if the object is presented concretely for direct sensory perception (and this is true even if we are well educated in the technicalities of art). Someone may tell us that Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto in A Major* is very sad and mournful, but that alone will not enable us to know exactly how it is sad or mournful (or in what way these emotions may be felt and experienced in Mozart's concerto)*;* we will never fully know how it feels unless we hear the music being played (or, perhaps, if the narrator hums a few bars from Mozart's music for our benefit). Miller (1998, 35) tells us that this characteristic of aesthetic judgment starkly contrasts with moral judgments, wherein "someone who is morally wise can form a moral judgment by relying on trustworthy non-moralising reports of others. Indeed, our moral judgments of laws and policies are almost entirely formed in this way". If a trusted friend of mine describes the unusual activities of his wife, I could (on the basis of his detailed description of her affair with her doctor) confidently pronounce my moral judgment of her (e.g., "she is a flirtatious woman"). In contrast, no amount of oral or written description of some piece of artwork or a natural landscape will ever be sufficient to convey in full the emotion arising from firsthand experience. Miller (1998, 35) writes that "aesthetic judgment would not depend, in this way, on concrete presence unless it depended on spontaneous response to the object, the validity of which did not depend in

turn, on following a rule describing what properties of the object make for aesthetic value in question". In moral judgment, however, the assumption of universally held moral rules enables us to apply them to cases that are described to us, without our having to directly witness these cases.

This Kantian principle of universality directly contrasts with how we react to and judge something aesthetically; here, the relationship between value-conferring features and the emotion or mental state being evoked is particular in nature and cannot be universalised simply by saying that any object with similar features must evoke similar mental states. This argument regarding the particularity of aesthetic judgment is based largely on the belief that each successful art object is unique and can never be reproduced. Now, it has been argued that an art object (or any other thing that is viewed aesthetically) cannot be treated as a means to an end. This proposition must also imply that the object cannot be treated as a means for evoking or arousing emotion. To treat a tragic play like *Oedipus Rex* as a means of arousing pity and fear (which was what Aristotle did in his *Poetics*) is a mistake. If *Oedipus Rex* is a means of experiencing pity and fear, then this great work of Sophocles can be substituted and is dispensable; if a drug or a good hypnotist can induce similar feelings of pity and fear, *Oedipus Rex* and all good tragic dramas can be discarded by human civilisation. Because *Oedipus Rex* has been treasured for thousands of years, there must be something in the work that is irreplaceable. The work itself must be unique, and the fear and pity it arouses must be peculiar to the work alone, not substitutable by any other work, thing or process see Scruton 1974, 19–23). Indeed, the same could be said of natural landscapes, according to the aesthetic perspective.

The argument that aesthetic judgment is particularistic is based largely on the belief that each successful work of art is unique and can never be reproduced. Thus, a particular feature that confers value on one work of art (or a particular landscape) will not produce the same effect in another piece (or landscape). Powerful strokes of unmixed colours produce dynamism in Van Gogh's artwork, but the same technique would result in different (perhaps degraded) effects in Romantic-era paintings. Such principles may apply to one's appreciation of the natural environment: an orange sky at sunset produces a stunning effect at Niagara Falls, but the same phenomenon might produce dullness at Mertajam Hill when seen from Penang Island. This uniqueness might imply that general principles of aesthetic evaluation cannot exist, unlike moral judgments, for which general principles (which can be translated into universal laws) must exist.

Roger Scruton (1974, 25) argues against this idea of uniqueness in art and aesthetic appreciation. He says that we must distinguish first- from second-order features in morally significant actions. First-order features (such as bringing satisfaction, pleasure, or happiness) alone will never be sufficient for deciding

whether an act carries moral weight. Acts defined solely by one of these first-order features can count one way or the other. Acts with second-order features (which, according to Scruton can only be detected "by a certain amount of interpretation" of the action and context in which it is performed [1974, 25]), such as courage, cowardice, benevolence, rashness, honesty, or liberality, will always be distinguishable as either morally right or morally wrong. Scruton asserts that this type of evaluation is also applicable to aesthetic judgment. First-order aesthetic features might include details on a portrait or strokes of unmixed colours in a van Gogh painting, either of which could confer value in one work but not another. Similar to moral judgment, however, the realm of aesthetic evaluation also includes second-order features. Scruton (1974, 26) describes such features as being "tragic, moving, balanced, evocative, sincere, sad, refined, noble, sentimental and so on". These second-order features, which can only be detected after some amount of interpretation in the context of the work's presentation, can count only one way: as value-conferring features (Scruton, 1974, 26). A work cannot be bad because it is "refined" or unsuccessful because it is "evocative". Hence, argues Scruton (1974, 27), the attempt to distinguish aesthetic and moral judgments, based on the attribution of uniqueness to the former, must be deemed a failure and abandoned.

Scruton's comparison of second-order features in moral actions and aesthetic objects remains somewhat inaccurate. In the realm of moral actions, certain second-order features like courage and benevolence may always confer value; in fact, many past philosophers have emphasised the importance of such characteristics. However, when it comes to aesthetic judgment, those second-order features mentioned by Scruton may not always act as value-conferring features. In the 1970s, when conceptual art grew popular in certain parts of the world, conceptualists often ridiculed artists who produced works that strongly expressed certain emotions as "sensationalists" or "sentimentalists". At the time, some even argued that emphasising the expression of such feelings robs the artwork of its intellectual dimension and that a good work should express ideas, not mere sentiments. One might wonder how Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp, who emerged at the turn of the 20th century, would view works that heavily emphasise the expression of emotions. In the 20th century, the emergence of artists and movements that directly challenge established aesthetic norms and values has made it difficult for certain second-order features to always count in one way. Second-order features previously regarded as conferring value on a piece may now be seen as redundant or even negative elements of a work of art. Looking outside of Western artistic traditions, one comes to realise that the value of certain second-order features is hardly universal. The large number of sandstone statues of Hindu gods staked in neat rows around a Hindu temple creates a feeling of dynamism and movement on the walls of these temples, suggesting a tradition in which "dynamism" and "movement" confer great

aesthetic value. In Song China (10th century), however, such features would be viewed as disturbing, unharmonious, and generally negative; that artistic tradition emphasises quietude and serenity, expressed in simple unadorned celadon stoneware bowls whose thick green glaze mimics the feel and consistency of jade or in Chan Buddhist paintings filled with no more than three fruits, painted in black ink and surrounded by great portions of empty space on the silk canvas. Now, second-order features may count only one way if we consider the entire context (such as the relevant art movement, the cultural tradition and the period from which the work originated) while assessing the work. Still, Scruton is wrong when he says that second-order features count only one way, based on the fact that such features will receive widely varying evaluations in the contexts of differing art movements and cultural traditions. Nonetheless, the preceeding discussion challenges the claim that each work of is unique and that rules for aesthetic assessment would be impossible to craft. Such general rules can be crafted so long as they are circumscribed by the aesthetic values of particular art movements, cultural traditions, and periods. The fact that we refer to a piece as belonging to a certain movement, period, or cultural tradition already implies there are such "limited universal rules" that allow us to pick up on the value-conferring or significant features of the movement, period, or tradition. Such limited rules are not, however, true general rules in the sense of moral prescriptions. These aesthetic rules would apply to some works of art and not others, while a moral prescription must apply to all human persons irrespective of cultural tradition or ideological belief. Therefore, the difference between moral and aesthetic judgment remains the same: the former relies on universal maxims, while the latter does not (as its rules are limited to some members of a class and are not truly universal). As a possible exception to this claim, some works (usually those of very high quality that are appreciated across time and generations) are indeed irreplaceable; the emotion or mental states they express and evoke are unique to the piece. Even such "unique" works must share enough common features with some other works of art to allow us to place them in their respective movements or traditions; for example, we say that the paintings of Seurat (unique and irreplaceable as they are) belong to the Impressionist movement or that the symphonies of Mozart belong to the Romantic tradition. Still, such works must have certain other features that make them truly unique and irreplaceable. When aestheticians speak of the uniqueness of artwork, it is to this special class of highly successful works that they are referring.

We have agreed that moral judgments are based on maxims that have a degree of universality, while aesthetic judgments are not. Yet, moral maxims cannot have the degree of universality found in scientific laws, largely because there are moral nihilists (Miller 1998, 43). One form of moral nihilism rejects the view that moral statements describe some feature of the world on the grounds that no such feature exists. Because there are no moral facts (according to these nihilists), we must

conclude that moral statements have no truth value (and are therefore neither true nor false). A moral nihilist may understand all of the supporting evidence presented before him and still deny that a statement describing some action as morally wrong must be true; neither would she/he credit a statement labelling the person who performed the act immoral. Furthermore, moral maxims cannot attain the degree of universality achieved in science due to what Miller (1998, 43) calls "blind spots". He writes that "Aristotle's blind spot about hierarchy would keep him from some of our judgments about justice even if he responded rationally to the accumulation of evidence" (1998, 43). Mill is probably referring to Aristotle's belief in the inferiority of natural slaves and women (as demonstrated by Aristotle's claim that natural slaves may understand reason, but they are unable to initiate the reasoning necessary for making moral choices). Mill may be right that some people have preferences that make them unable to accept completely certain moral maxims that are intended as universal laws. Still, to say that these "blind spots" would forever "keep [them] from some of our judgments about justice even if [they] responded rationally to the accumulation of evidence" is unconvincing. After all, there are people who change their beliefs or values in response to accumulated evidence.

Because someone could reject every moral maxim on the aforementioned grounds, we can never attain true universality as in science. It is, therefore, more precise to say that in moral judgment, the one making a judgment assumes the universality of the maxims employed in that judgment; that person feels that everyone (without exception) should act in the same way in the same situation, even if, in practice, it is highly unlikely that everyone would accept the maxim being employed. By contrast, the person making an aesthetic judgment does not assume the universality of the criteria employed in the judgment (i.e., one cannot say that some criterion applies to all works of art or objects in the same situation).

Turning back to environmental aesthetics, we should note that judgment in environmental aesthetics differs from judgments in morality and “art aesthetics” in at least one way. One reason for making moral judgments is to distinguish between good and bad actions (we refer, of course, only to actions that have moral significance); likewise, the aim of aesthetic judgment in art is to differentiate the good work from the bad. In environmental aesthetics, however, judgment may not serve this function; we might offer reasons for admiring a beautiful or evocative landscape but would be unlikely to criticise a natural landscape as ugly or offensive (except on rare occasions, such as when a developer wishes to replace an unattractive landscape with supposedly beautiful, dynamic buildings; such remarks, when uttered, are seldom taken seriously). In judging environmental aesthetics, we tend to praise rather than criticise the natural environment. In what ways, then, are the discussions of moral and aesthetic judgments relevant to understanding environmental aesthetic

judgments? Environmental aesthetics resemble aesthetic judgments in that there are no truly universal rules for appreciating a natural landscape. Because natural landscapes are not man-made and therefore do not belong to specific movements, periods, or cultural traditions, developing general rules for appreciation becomes even harder. A feature that enhances the beauty and appeal of one seascape may be entirely neutral in a different seascape. While this lack of universal rules might represent a significant difference between the aesthetic and moral approaches to the environment, it certainly does not indicate that the moral approach is more important than the aesthetic one. The only good reason for assuming the superiority of moral over aesthetic approaches to environmental protection is the capacity of moral reasons to override other reasons (including, presumably, aesthetic ones).

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD MORAL AND AESTHETIC JUDGMENTS

Scruton argues that attempting to differentiate the aesthetic from the moral approach by emphasising the uniqueness of the art object or the aesthetic experience derived from the object is a fruitless venture. We can refer to the second-order features of actions, such as courage, liberality, benevolence, or cowardice, without first-hand experience. I need not actually witness John handing a portion of his yearly income to starving people in Africa to know that his actions are generous and benevolent; reports of his actions would suffice. Scruton (1974, 26) argues that, by the same token, second-order features in aesthetic evaluation, such as forcefulness, tragedy, evocativeness, or balance, can be described and understood second-hand, without any direct experience of the work. While effectively describing these second-order features requires the narrator to invoke the work's context, such descriptions can still be understood without making the object available to direct perception. Scruton therefore suggests that aesthetic judgments may be distinguished from moral judgments in terms of our attitudes toward them, in other words, how we react and respond to them.

Before engaging with Scruton's contention, I would like to note a couple of potential problems with it. Firstly, it is simply not true that second-order features in aesthetic evaluation always carry the same type and degree of value, unlike second-order features in moral actions. For example, a Zen painter may find dynamism and movement in a painting disturbing and inharmonious, even though these features may be highly valued in Western Romantic paintings or futuristic sculptures. Another problem for Scruton is that not every expert in aesthetic criticism would agree that second-order features could be adequately conveyed by offering "a total description of the works of art which possess them" (Scruton 1974, 26). In the first place, one wonders if it is possible to give "a total

description" of all of the features and technical details of the work to convey its second-order features in their totality without, at the same time, presenting the work itself to the audience. For instance, to describe the total effect of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto,* one might have to resort to humming its rhythm and melody. Ultimately, the best way to describe Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* in its totality is to play the music itself; describing its technical details will not produce the same effect. In fact, Susan Langer has pointed out that we turn to artistic symbolism simply because no amount of discursive language can adequately express or convey certain emotions or mental states (Langer 1957, 228). If this is so, then no amount of detailed description can ever convey or evoke the emotion expressed in Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*. This proposition must strengthen the claim for uniqueness: the only way to fully comprehend the emotion a work evokes is to experience it directly.

This argument does not mean that the art object and our responses to it are truly unique and, thus, irreplaceable. In the first place, those who stress the uniqueness of works of art or our responses to them usually cite the most successful or best-known pieces to make their case. How, then, do we judge the paintings and drawings made by high school or college students based on the general principles taught by their art teachers? These, too, are surely works of art, even though they lack the quality and refinement of the works of the great masters. The same can surely be said of sculptures and simple musical compositions made by students from general principles taught by their masters. The case for uniqueness gets even weaker if one looks beyond the Western art tradition at, say, Chinese or Japanese classical paintings. Novices in those disciplines have faithfully reproduced Fan Kuan's *Travelling Along Mountains and Rivers* (990–1030), as well as the works of other great masters, as part of their training. One might argue that it is impossible to completely reproduce another work of art and that the reproduction must be different somehow, if not in the technical details then in expressiveness. However, there are reports of copies of Fan Kuan's work that appear exactly like the original, right down to the movement and sweep of every small brushstroke. It would be hard to see how these works could not evoke the same emotions as the original. Furthermore, some of these successful copies have been displayed with slightly different titles, such as *A Copy of Fan Kuan's Travelling Along Mountains and Rivers*, a fact that rules out the possibility that these different paintings are simply manifestations of the same work of art. These successful copies are also highly valued, although not to the same degree as the original.

Thus, it would appear that generalisations about the uniqueness of all artwork are impossible to make. Some of the great works of longstanding regard may be truly unique; indeed, their ability to evoke peculiar, irreplaceable emotions may be one reason they remain highly valued through many centuries. Still, this property may not apply in all cases. Works of lesser quality, especially those produced by

amateurs and students, may be based on very general principles. From this, we can conclude that there are indeed universal principles in art. If there were not, art training would be impossible. However, great artists manage to go beyond these basic principles to create works that are truly exceptional, maybe even irreplaceable. I do not reject the uniqueness hypothesis on the same grounds as Scruton. Scruton has sidelined the hypothesis as fruitless on grounds that second-order features in art, like those in morality, can count only one way (e.g., as value-conferring features) and that it is possible to fully understand these second-order features by accessing a detailed description of the work (thereby eliminating the need to experience the work first-hand). I have rejected both claims with counter-examples. However, I accept Scruton's view that the idea of uniqueness in artwork is highly problematic, suggesting that the difference between aesthetic and moral judgments may be more fruitfully explored elsewhere.

From here, Scruton's claims that the distinction between moral and aesthetic approaches is based on our attitudes or reactions to them, arguing that moral judgments are always taken more seriously than aesthetic ones (Scruton 1974, 141). If someone infringes on a moral principle, we may blame him, confront him, criticise him in public, withdraw whatever goodwill we have toward him, or even take him to court to invoke other formal penalties for his actions. Similarly, if we discover that we have unwisely infringed on (what we consider to be) a moral imperative, we may suffer regret, remorse, guilt, self-hatred, or even willingly submit to the prescribed legal punishment. Moral infringements always incur sanctions. We cannot, however, adopt the same attitude towards infringement on aesthetic values. If someone wears clothes that show poor taste or is unable to appreciate the balance and unity in Michelangelo's *David*, we do not respond as we would to an immoral act. Similarly, if I were to discover that I lacked good aesthetic taste and had infringed on certain aesthetic norms, I probably would not feel the kind of guilt, remorse, and self-hatred mentioned above. Aesthetic judgments therefore lack the seriousness we attach to moral or ethical judgments.

However, this distinction does not imply that aesthetic judgments are subjective or arbitrary, for strong reasons can be given in support of certain aesthetic judgments and prescriptions (such as art critics' rationales for appreciating da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*). In the same way, one may also offer strong reasons for labelling a landscape serene, harmonious, or beautiful. Scruton (1974, 142–143) argues that aesthetic judgments are, in this sense, "normative": aesthetic reasoning can function not only to support aesthetic judgments but also to transform tastes or train someone in aesthetic sensibility.

Scruton's approach to distinguishing between aesthetic and moral judgments (based on our attitudes or reactions) applies to the issue of environmental aesthetics more fittingly than the view premised on the uniqueness of the object. The contention that aesthetic judgments lack the seriousness of moral prescriptions implies that aesthetic reasons for environmental protection can never be as important as practical reasons directed at environmental preservation, provided that such practical reasons are presented in the form of moral reasons or involve moral considerations, such as "We need to preserve the environment to ensure the wellbeing of future generations", a statement that implies that it would be morally wrong to do anything that harms the wellbeing of future generations, including destroying or degrading the environment to serve present needs.

In other words, Scruton has provided us with one strong reason why moral considerations must always override aesthetic ones, even in the area of environmental protection. If practical reasons are presented with moral overtones, they must override any conflicting aesthetic considerations because they appear more serious from our point of view. Hence, practical reasons for environmental protection, if also moral, must necessarily be more important than aesthetic reasons for environmental protection.

However, Scruton's approach is not devoid of problems. In a recent news report entitled "Are Fat People Destroying Earth?" (Robert 2009), scientists from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine claimed that obese people are speeding the destruction of the environment because their elevated food intake leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions from livestock, agriculture, and the transportation of food and animal feed. Additionally, more fuel is used in transporting overweight people. We have argued that, from a practical viewpoint, there is a moral dimension to issues of environmental protection or destruction because the degradation of the environment affects the interest and wellbeing of future generations. According to this logic, because fat people are responsible for the degradation of the environment (and they cannot plead innocence, as reports of their responsibility are beginning to surface), they should be held accountable. Scruton has emphasised that infringing on moral principles (in this case, doing something that could adversely affect the wellbeing of future generations) must involve sanctions. If so, then we must withdraw goodwill from those who choose to stay fat, confront them, blame them, and expose their wrongdoing to others. If I should remain fat, doing nothing to diminish my obesity, then I should experience extreme remorse, regret, guilt, and self-hatred, and I ought to willingly subject myself to societal penalties or punishment. Such pronouncements, however, sound highly ridiculous. One cannot completely dismiss Scruton's claim that we often do these things to people who are morally blameworthy. Yet, we may not do so in all cases, and it may not always be practical to withdraw goodwill from those we consider to be morally blameworthy (example e.g., if the

person in question happens to be your employer and the only one around willing to employ your services for an acceptable salary or if that person is a loved one you do not wish to displease). We do make exceptions in life; while the good and wise man may consistently condemn anyone who is morally blameworthy, the vast majority of people have certain "soft spots" for other people. Thus, they may not jump to ridicule fat people even if they believe the conclusions of the aforementioned report. Scruton is wrong because our treatment of morally blameworthy people is, to say the least, inconsistent. Thus, the quest to differentiate between moral and aesthetic judgments by finding some common feature of the former that is also universally absent from the latter seems to face enormous difficulties. Philosophers engaging in this debate would do well to look for another strategy to differentiate moral from aesthetic judgments.

AESTHETIC REASONS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Others have argued that the aesthetic approach to both artwork and the environment is directed principally at pleasure and must, therefore, lack a moral dimension. Yet, enjoyment-focused activities are not inherently devoid of a moral dimension. Earlier, we concluded that practical reasons for environmental preservation have a moral dimension because they are aimed at (i) human survival, (ii) safeguarding our welfare and quality of life, or (iii) both. While aesthetic reasons for environmental protection may not be directed at safeguarding human survival, they do, nonetheless, aim at ensuring a certain quality of life that bears on human welfare. Imagine future generations living in concrete jungles with little or no greenery, mountain ranges levelled, and seashores polluted beyond recognition. The lack of any opportunity to enjoy majestic waterfalls, sublime mountain ranges, and beautiful shorelines must take something out of living; it must stifle the development of certain emotions and our capacity to express ourselves. This deficit, then, must affect the quality of life and deplete human welfare. In this manner, the aesthetic reasons for environmental preservation can be seen to incorporate a moral dimension: depriving future generations of this capacity for enjoying and admiring natural beauty must necessarily degrade their wellbeing and quality of life, which is morally wrong. In this way, aesthetic reasons can equal the importance of practical reasons for environmental protection. In the face of arguments that practical reasons aimed at the survival of the human race are more important than aesthetic considerations affecting human wellbeing and quality of life, one may provide a simple reply: survival without a certain quality of life and overall wellbeing would make life quite meaningless. One wants not only to survive but also to live well. A sensible or rational person might say that both are equally important.

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